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ABSTRACT

In order to determine whether the characteristics and perceptions of adults over 21 years old differ significantly from those of college age students, a study was made of 1,178 (about 20 percent) of the 5,532 full-time day students enrolled at Diablo Valley College during fall 1971. Subjects were selected by stratified random sampling methods, with the stratification based on six age-sex groups: ages under 22, 22-30, and over 30, for each sex. Data for the study were gathered from the students' academic records, responses to a mailed questionnaire, and followup interviews. The older students, particularly older females, proved to be more traditional in their attitudes toward the educational process. At the same time, their academic records demonstrated greater seriousness of purpose, persistence, and higher academic achievement. These findings indicate that some currently popular educational practices may no longer be appropriate as larger proportions of students beyond the usual college-going age enroll in regular programs. Questionable practices might include: unstructured, student-centered teaching styles; minimization of course requirements; emphasis on personal counseling; dropping of traditional grading systems, and custodial administrative attitudes. The survey instrument is appended. (Author/NHM)

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Adults as Regular Community College Students: A Comparative Analysis of Some of their Characteristics and Perceptions and those of College-Age Students

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

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JC 730 209

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Summary of Findings and Conclusions

Background

The primary motivation for this study derived from concern about the suitability of many existing community college programs and services in light of the enrollment of older persons, especially women, as a growing proportion of the colleges' regular daytime student bodies. It was noted that, traditionally, most aspects of a college's regular day operations (as distinguished from its evening or adult education programs) have been established to serve a college-age (under twenty-two years of age) student clientele. The question that naturally followed, therefore, was whether the older students differ sufficiently from the younger students for their increasing numbers to have serious implications for a community college's current evaluation and future planning of its activities.

An extensive review of the literature revealed that, while students in general have been the subjects of research for many years, older students (i.e., those twenty-two years of age and over) seldom have specifically been studied other than in the context of adult education. This was found to be the situation especially for older female students. Moreover, even where

pertinent data may have been gathered in the course of other studies, there seemed to be little evidence of comparative analyses having been made to identify possible differences between subgroupings of students on the basis of age and sex.

In the absence of empirical evidence to the contrary, therefore, it was hypothesized that there might be differences between the student age-sex groups of which the community college should be aware. Based on this hypothesis, several questions were posed to which the study was designed to obtain answers.

The single college chosen as the site of the study was reasonably typical of the moderately large, suburban two-year institutions of which there were about fifteen in California at the time of the study. The study sample consisted of 1,170 (about 20 percent) of the 5,810 full-time day students who had been enrolled at the college during Fall 1971. Individual subjects were drawn from the population by stratified, random sampling methods, with the stratification based on six age-sex groupings (i.e., ages under 22, 23 to 30, and over 30 for each sex).

Data for the study were gathered from the students' academic records on file in the Registrar's office of the college, by means of a mailed questionnaire (sample attached), and by follow-up interviews with samples of the questionnaire respondents and non-respondents. These data were processed by computer to determine differences among the student age-sex groups in academic performance and in their perceptions of several aspects of their experiences while attending the

college. The practical significance of observed differences was tested by chi-square and by calculation of 5 values shown as significance.

Findings

The findings that resulted from the study have been presented and are presented below in the form of answers to the three primary research questions.

Question 1. How do older persons perceive their experiences as regular community college students?

Findings

1. A majority of the persons twenty-two years of age and older who responded to the survey questionnaire indicated favorable perceptions of the aspects of their community college experiences that were specified in the study. In addition, they seemed to feel that what they had studied at the college held considerable relevance for their current occupations. The females were especially strong in expressing the latter opinion.

2. The older group tended to be quite satisfied with their decision to enroll at the college in courses in which they were interested, and with the practical value of what they had to learn. The strongest views in this regard came from the over-50 persons. The oldest group were very well pleased with the availability of what they considered to be courses suitable for them.

3. Favorable attitudes also were expressed toward the teachers, especially with regard to the perceived benefits of direct face

required general education courses. Exercises in the suggestions that they might have taken more courses in certain majors as many did have done courses, but a small percentage still needed to produce the necessary points of course requirements.

6. The other respondents indicated a preference for more traditional types of work in their perceptions of teaching styles and learning environments. In other words, they expressed preferences for regular class attendance and for being given definite assignments by their instructors, rather than being left to study more independently. Furthermore, although psychology did indicate a liking for discussions and an interpersonal style in classroom interactions, there were many, and students generally disagreed with these concepts. Over 50 majors also particularly agreed to experiencing these concepts today, with 51.2 percent feeling that they had learned more from lectures than from discussions and 51.2 percent disagreeing of the environmental style. 48.2 percent strongly act. Use of instructor assistance as classroom teaching aids, on the other hand, was perceived by a very large majority. 88.2 percent of the other group [illegible] to learn.[1]

7. Responses between students and faculty also generally associated by the other respondents as having been good. There was a significant difference between the males and females in this age group, however, with the females feeling both more strongly than the males that there were instructors but with more classes enjoyable. The

[illegible]

the college should be more strict in regulating student behavior. There were some significant differences between the older and younger groups, however, to the extent that the older group had had less difficulty with the rules and had a somewhat stronger desire for greater strictness, especially in relation to conduct in classes and study areas.

9. With regard to personal study habits, the 22-and-over age group indicated that they had had to study outside of class significantly more than those under age 22. In addition, the over-30 respondents had made greater use of the Audio-Visual Center than had the others. The 22-and-over females also appeared to be somewhat more consistent users of the college library.

10. Significantly more of the older group than of the younger group had had difficulty with conflicts between their personal affairs and their college schedules, but the females of all age groups reported less trouble than the males. Furthermore, the females were less likely than the males to feel that pressures of their personal affairs added to the difficulty of their college work. The females also were more satisfied that the existing college library schedule was convenient for them.

11. Although relatively few of the respondents in any of the age-sex groups apparently had felt in need of financial assistance to attend college, significantly more of the older group than of the younger indicated that they had. The further indication, however, was that they had not looked to the college as a source of

help to the extent that the younger people had.

12. In expressing general perceptions of the college, the older females were least likely to think it was too much like a high school. The older group as a whole also was less likely to perceive the daytime class schedule as favoring the younger unemployed student. With regard to choosing the same college if they were to start over again, a significantly larger proportion of the older respondents than of the younger ones indicated that they would. The interviews confirmed these questionnaire findings.

Question 3. Are the academic characteristics of the older students significantly different from those of the younger students and, if so, in what ways do they differ?

Findings

1. The mean total number of semesters enrolled at the college by members of the older age-sex group was greater than for the younger group. Most of this difference was attributable to the relatively high average (almost six semesters) for the older males. Females, young and old, had attended fewer semesters on the average than the males in their corresponding age groups.

2. Termination of enrollment of the older students was less likely to coincide with the end of the school year (in June) than it was for the younger students.

3. While there was no significant difference between the under-22 and 22-and-over age groups in the mean number of units completed per semester, the over-30 females had a very significantly

higher mean (13.27) than all of the others in the sample.

4. The mean grade point average of the older group was significantly higher than for the younger group. Furthermore, the mean for the females as a group was higher than for the males, and the older (22-and-over) females had the highest mean GPA of all: 3.08.

5. Both males and females in the over-30 age group received fewer W grades per semester than the under-22 age group. The over-30 females were exceptionally low with a mean of less than one W per three semesters enrolled.

6. The older males and females were awarded a higher proportion of AA degrees and vocational certificates than were either sex in the younger group. The older females had received the largest proportion of AA degrees in combination with certificates.

7. Six semesters after having been enrolled at the college full time in day classes, the older females were the most likely of all the age-sex groups still to be enrolled at the same college (23.1 percent). Both males and females in the older age group were much less likely than the younger ones, however, to be enrolled at some other college or university (35.0 percent vs. 52.2 percent, respectively) six semesters later.

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that, in all age and sex groups, the majority of the respondents expressed overall satisfaction with most of their experiences as students at the project

college. This is consistent with the results of earlier studies, such as those by Astin,[6] Goldsen,[7] Monroe,[8] and others, who found that students generally have shown favorable attitudes toward the colleges they attended. Berg even determined that "students who had dropped out [of community colleges] during the first semester and those who entered on probation and had been disqualified at the end of the first semester reflected positive feelings."[9]

Within these general expressions of satisfaction, however, some significant differences among the student age-sex groups were distinguished by this study. These differences lead to the following conclusions, which are believed to be of importance to a community college in evaluating and planning its programs and activities:

<u>As older students, especially females over thirty years of age, comprise an increasing proportion of regular community college enrollments, there will tend to be:</u>

1. Less demand for and acceptance of loosely organized, unstructured teaching styles; informal seminar-type classes; and undirected or independent study.
2. Increased acceptance of and appreciation for course requirements, especially those related to general education.
3. Less tolerance for what is perceived by the student to be careless or poorly planned instruction.
4. More demand for accountability of both students and instructors in accomplishment of educational objectives.

5. Increased insistence upon practical, as opposed to personal or psychological, counseling.

6. Continuing lack of enthusiasm for departures from traditional systems of grading and certification.

7. Greater student motivation and persistence in the pursuit of educational goals, accompanied by a higher level of scholarship and seriousness of academic purpose, as reflected in higher grade point averages and achievement of formal recognition, such as degrees and certificates.

8. Less need for traditional student activities that emphasize entertainment in the form of early-post-adolescent social events, such as "rock" concerts, dances, etc.

9. Less dependence upon the institution for solution of personal problems related to enrollment and attendance.

10. Continuing need for financial aid, but in forms suitable for and acceptable to older persons.

Implications

In light of these findings and conclusions, it appears to be imperative that a community college give weight to the age-sex mix of its student body in self-evaluation and planning. Any self-study must include provision for sampling the perceptions of the various constituent groups of the regular day enrollment.

Furthermore, faculty members must be conscious of the prospect of greater heterogeneity in classrooms already noted for this characteristic in the community college. In the future, however,

the major problem may relate more to the teaching style of the instructor than to the diversity of the background and learning abilities of the students. This is because the lecture, student-centered, "do-your-own-thing" style adopted during recent years by many instructors, especially the younger ones, was shown by this study to be less satisfactory to older students. In fact, the study seemed to indicate a desire for a much more structured, directive, and instructor-centered environment than many advocate in the more restricted area of adult education have proposed.

Closely related to heterogeneity of attitudes toward learning environments as classroom problems are the uncleanness of purpose, demand for stricter accountability of both students and instructors, and desire for and achievement of generally higher conditions, grades and other forms of scholastic recognition that will accompany enrollment of larger proportions of older people in regular courses. Perhaps a partial solution to these problems, at least as far as multiple-section courses are concerned, may lie in Hayner's suggestion[10] that some sections might offer different approaches to learning environments that are tailored to the attributes of the several potential clienteles distinguished by this study. At the very least, and including single-section courses, the individual instructor's style and classroom atmosphere should be made quite clear well in advance to all so that the student may make a knowledgeable choice prior to enrollment. Although the study results indicate that this already was being done to some extent by

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

DIABLO VALLEY COLLEGE

Survey of Former Students

1 - 4

Will you please help us to evaluate and improve the services DVC provides for its students? Your responses to the items on this survey form will give us much valuable information about what the students' opinions of the College and its programs are. We plan to use this information to identify areas where changes are needed.

Please complete all of the items as indicated and return the completed form to Diablo Valley College in the enclosed envelope.

PART A - Present Status

1. What is your present occupation? (Check all that apply.)

- [ ] Full-time DVC student
- [ ] Part-time DVC student
- [ ] Full-time student at other college or university
- [ ] Part-time student at other college or university
- [ ] Unemployed
- [ ] Working full time (including military)
- [ ] Working part time
- [ ] Full-time homemaker
- [ ] Part-time homemaker
- [ ] Other (specify): _____

2. Does what you studied at DVC relate to your present occupation? (Check one.)

[ ] None at [ ] A little [ ] Somewhat [ ] Very much

DO NOT WRITE BELOW

10	11
12	13
14	15
16	17
18	19
20	

PART B - Experiences at DVC

Instructions: Below are some statements that a student might make about his or her experiences while attending DVC. Based on your own experiences, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements by circling one of the letters which are at the right of each item and stand for the following:

SA= Strongly Agree A= Agree D= Disagree SD= Strongly Disagree

Example:

I didn't have to register to be a student at DVC. SA A D (SD)

Statements

1.	Usually, I was able to enroll in the courses I wanted.	SA	A	D	SD
2.	It was not very hard for me to get an A or B grade in most of my classes.	SA	A	D	SD
3.	I learned more in classes with instructor-led discussions than I did in the usual lecture-style classes.	SA	A	D	SD
4.	The registration schedule and procedures were very inconvenient for me.	SA	A	D	SD
5.	Through other students, I found out who were the best instructors and tried to get into their courses.	SA	A	D	SD
6.	I knew what I wanted to do when I started at DVC, so I didn't need any counseling.	SA	A	D	SD
7.	I liked it when some of my instructors used an unstructured, "loose" style in their classes.	SA	A	D	SD

21 22 23 24 25 26 27

8.	I didn't really know whether or not DVC had any rules for student behavior.	SA	A	D	SD	28
9.	It would have been better for me if I could have taken all of my classes on one or two days per week, instead of spread out over Monday through Friday.	SA	A	D	SD	29
10.	Few of the courses that were available were suitable for what I went to DVC to learn.	SA	A	D	SD	30
11.	A counselor usually was available at a time convenient for me.	SA	A	D	SD	31
12.	It was not much of a problem to fit my college schedule into my personal affairs.	SA	A	D	SD	32
13.	I didn't know enough about the availability of such student services as job placement, financial aids, health, etc., to be able to use them if I had wanted to.	SA	A	D	SD	33
14.	I didn't have any particular difficulty with the college's rules or regulations governing students.	SA	A	D	SD	34
15.	I had to study almost every evening while I was attending DVC.	SA	A	D	SD	35
16.	I discovered many interesting things in what I thought would just be dull required courses.	SA	A	D	SD	36
17.	Whenever possible, I used the materials in the Audio-Visual Center in the Library.	SA	A	D	SD	37
18.	My instructors usually were readily available for discussion when I had problems.	SA	A	D	SD	38
19.	I attended DVC only to take courses, and student activities, such as social events, were of no interest to me.	SA	A	D	SD	39
20.	I was not able to get the counseling and guidance I needed to plan my program.	SA	A	D	SD	40
21.	There were too many restrictions on the behavior and activities of students.	SA	A	D	SD	41
22.	I needed financial help to attend DVC.	SA	A	D	SD	42
23.	Poor advice from a counselor caused difficulty for me.	SA	A	D	SD	43
24.	It was very hard for me to study at home.	SA	A	D	SD	44
25.	If audio-visual materials (recorded tapes, TV, photo slides, etc.) were used in class, they were interesting, but they didn't help me very much to learn the subject.	SA	A	D	SD	45
26.	The college work by itself was not hard, but, with the personal things I had to do, it became difficult.	SA	A	D	SD	46

27.	The hours and days the College Library was open were not convenient for me.	SA	A	D	SD	47
28.	Not many of my instructors made classes very stimulating.	SA	A	D	SD	48
29.	In my opinion, DVC was not strict enough in regulating student behavior.	SA	A	D	SD	49
30.	I wish that all of my courses had been graded on the "credit-no credit" basis instead of "A to F".	SA	A	D	SD	50
31.	Most of my instructors tried very hard to make sure all of their students learned the course material.	SA	A	D	SD	51
32.	I would have liked more freedom to choose the courses I really wanted, rather than having to take required courses.	SA	A	D	SD	52
33.	I often used the College Library for reference and study.	SA	A	D	SD	53
34.	The grades I received didn't mean much to me because I was more interested in satisfying myself that I knew the subject.	SA	A	D	SD	54
35.	I preferred being given definite assignments by my instructors, rather than being left to make my own plans for reading and studying.	SA	A	D	SD	55
36.	I would recommend DVC to a friend of my age who was considering going to college full time.	SA	A	D	SD	56
37.	In my opinion, the counselors didn't know much more than I did about the courses and occupations in which I was interested.	SA	A	D	SD	57
38.	I would not have been much interested in a course if I did not get a grade and units of credit for taking it.	SA	A	D	SD	58
39.	Most of my instructors did not seem to be aware of or interested in the problems a student might have.	SA	A	D	SD	59
40.	Most student services (job placement, financial aid, health, etc.) were not suitable for my needs.	SA	A	D	SD	60
41.	The atmosphere of the campus was more like a high school than I think a college should be.	SA	A	D	SD	61
42.	I often didn't know how well I was doing until I received a grade on a mid-term, a paper, or some other assignment during the semester.	SA	A	D	SD	62
43.	Many of the courses I took were unrealistic and had little practical value.	SA	A	D	SD	63

44.	The administrrative offices of the college seemed cold and impersonal in dealing with studdents.	SA	A	D	SD	64
45.	I am glad thast I had to take the required general eeducation courses, because they helped me to learn something more than just my major subject.	SA	A	D	SD	65
46.	I would have preferred to have been able to study morre on my own and not to be required to attend so many regular classes.	SA	A	D	SD	66
47.	If I were to start over, I would choose DVC again.	SA	A	D	SD	67
48.	The regular daytime class schedule seemed to be designed mainly for the younger unemployeed student.	SA	A	D	SD	68
49.	Many times reading and other assignments outside off class took more work than I had time for.	SA	A	D	SD	69
50.	What the student government did was of little interest to me.	SA	A	D	SD	70

Thank you for yourr help. Please return this form in the enclosed envelope.

If you wish too add any written comments, you may do so in the space below.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

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